United Nations A/C.5/60/SR.17

General Assembly
Sixtieth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
18 November 2005

Original: English

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 17th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 1 November 2005, at 9.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Saizonou (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Benin)
Acting Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Saha

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05-58172 (E)

In the absence of Mr. Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda), Mr. Saizonou (Benin), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 9.35 a.m.

Agenda item 127: Pattern of conferences (A/60/32, A/60/93, A/60/112 and A/60/433; A/C.5/60/9)

1. **Mr. Simancas** (Chairman of the Committee on Conferences), introducing the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2005 (A/60/32), said that the Secretary-General's practice of reporting on most of the items on the Committee's agenda in two consolidated reports had been continued and had facilitated their consideration by the Committee in a more cohesive manner. The Committee had sought to make progress on some long-standing and difficult issues. However, it had been unable to agree on elements of a draft resolution for adoption by the General Assembly, notwithstanding the liveliness of the discussions and the diversity of the views expressed. Some delegations had considered that lack of time was to blame. The Committee should consider, at its organizational session in early 2006, possible changes to its working methods that would enable it to fulfil its mandate and provide more relevant advice to the Assembly. The Committee could make its work more focused by limiting discussion to matters within its purview.

2. With regard to the draft calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2006-2007, only one matter had remained outstanding: the dates of the session of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. He had recently been informed that dates had been proposed for the session following the conduct of extensive consultations by the secretariat of that body.

3. Concerning the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities in New York, Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna, the overall utilization factor for the four duty stations had been 83 per cent in 2004, significantly exceeding its levels of previous years. The improvement had been due to the closer involvement of meeting planners in the programming of sessions and conscientious efforts by secretariats and bureaux to utilize allocated resources more efficiently. Like his predecessors, he had held consultations with the presiding officers and secretaries of bodies that had underutilized their resources for three years in a row, urging them to make changes to their working methods. United Nations bodies should continue to be encouraged to find ways to organize their work more efficiently, so as to make optimum use of conference resources. In addition, the methodology for measuring utilization required further fine-tuning.

4. The proportion of meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States provided with interpretation in 2004/05 had fallen to 85 per cent. At the same time, the number of meetings for which interpretation had been requested had also decreased. Some members of the Committee had suggested that the improvement in the overall utilization factor was a mixed blessing, as it effectively left fewer resources for reassignment to regional and other major groupings. Others had noted that, from a full-system perspective, the increased utilization of conference resources was beneficial for all and was, in fact, the main goal of the Committee.

5. Regarding the utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), concern had been expressed about the continuing high vacancy rates in Nairobi and about the impact of security measures in Addis Ababa.

6. The Committee had considered the report of the Secretary-General on the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (A/60/112) in great detail. It had welcomed and supported the Secretary-General's continuing efforts in that regard, while stressing that the reform should be aimed at improving the timely delivery of documentation and the quality of conference services and at meeting the needs of Member States efficiently and cost-effectively. It was understood that those goals could not be realized concurrently; special emphasis had been placed on quality.

7. Representatives of conference services at the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi had participated via videoconference in the Committee's 467th meeting. On that occasion, members had commended the Department on its efforts in the area of integrated global management. They had noted the progress achieved in integrating information technology tools, including e-Meets, in conference management, while emphasizing that information technology systems and capabilities must reflect the specific needs of each duty station and that no duty

station should be dependent on others for the development of its information technology systems.

8. Regarding documentation- and publication-related matters, the familiar concerns had been raised with respect to equality of the six official languages, late issuance of documentation and compliance with page limits and submission guidelines by author departments. The Secretariat should be encouraged to fine-tune those arrangements. Some members had suggested a one-year pilot project aimed at issuing pre-session documents not later than four weeks prior to their consideration.

9. The Committee had been informed that steps were being taken to address the high vacancy rates in the language services. It had also noted with appreciation the Department's practice of holding informational meetings with Member States in order to consult with them. It had discussed the study of workload standards and performance measurement on the basis of additional information provided in a non-paper. The issue appeared to require further research and study. The Committee had also considered the financial and other implications of two pilot projects on summary records. Lastly, it had discussed access to documentation by delegates with disabilities. It had agreed that a letter should be addressed to the President of the General Assembly informing him that the Committee had considered the issue favourably and suggesting that the Assembly should consider it on a priority basis. The letter had been issued as document A/C.5/60/9.

10. **Mr. Chen** Jian (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/60/93) and the report of the Secretary-General on the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (A/60/112). While he was grateful to the Committee on Conferences for its work in 2005, he regretted that the Committee had been unable to propose elements of a draft resolution on the pattern of conferences for adoption by the General Assembly.

11. Over the past year, the Department had continued to make progress in implementing its mandates. Overall utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities had exceeded the benchmark for the first time since 2000, while the utilization rate at the United Nations Office at Nairobi had increased by 28 per cent during the biennium 2003-2004 compared to the previous biennium. The summary records of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly had been issued in a more timely manner, and the backlog from previous sessions had been reduced. Detailed information had been made available on the submission of pre-session documentation by author departments. Increased application of information technology had led to more timely and cost-effective delivery of outputs. All of those achievements had been realized within the Department's allocated resources.

12. Overall, the Department had been able to sustain the momentum of reform while initiating new projects to further rationalize the workflow and enhance synergies. For example, in the first phase of a pilot project undertaken by the Central Planning and Coordination Service and the Documentation Division, the Central Planning and Coordination Service had estimated the expected monthly output of each translation service for consecutive three-month periods. That estimate had then been used by the translation services as the basis for their capacity planning. The methodology still needed adjustment in order to become a truly effective tool for matching resources and output as closely as possible.

13. As the Department proceeded with its reform efforts, it was becoming increasingly aware that certain factors were beyond its control. While the Department would continue to do what it could, efforts to tackle those external factors must be stepped up; as the Main Committee of the General Assembly charged with formulating mandates on conference management, the Fifth Committee had a significant role to play in that regard.

14. Since the Department's four goals of quality, productivity, timeliness and cost-effectiveness were not fully compatible, and could even be mutually conflicting, they must be properly prioritized. In the early stages of the reform process, the Department had focused on eliminating overexpenditures through better planning and had achieved a noticeable reduction in the use of temporary assistance and overtime. It had then moved on to improving timeliness and, subsequently, to raising overall output, all within available resources. In that process, the improvement of quality presented a constant challenge. The Department would welcome the Committee's understanding and guidance, given that progress in the

achievement of one goal might mean sacrifice in the achievement of another.

15. The question of summary records was one example of the quandaries facing the Department. It was clear that the Department did not have the human and financial resources to process all summary records in-house and on time. However, processing the records through contractual translation involved a rather long turnaround time. If summary records for all of the intergovernmental bodies entitled to them were required in a shorter time frame, in-house translation and other capacities would have to be strengthened, with significant financial implications, as well as possible waste. A decision by the Committee on the question was urgently needed. As the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences had pointed out, there was also a need to reconcile the conflicting aims of increasing utilization of conference-servicing resources, on the one hand, and providing interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, on the other. In that regard, the Committee might wish to examine the three options outlined in the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/60/93).

16. The Department was sometimes confronted with different mandates from different intergovernmental bodies. For example, while the Fifth Committee had called for control and limitation of documentation, the Sixth Committee had obtained General Assembly endorsement of a blanket waiver of page limits for all documents of the International Law Commission, placing the Department in a difficult position. There was thus an urgent need for greater consistency among mandates. Again, the Fifth Committee might play a role in that regard.

17. Mandates should strike a balance between what was desirable and what was practical. Of particular interest in that context was the "six-week rule" for document issuance. While document users wanted to receive documents as early as possible, author departments wished to incorporate the most up-to-date information and input from Member States and therefore had to balance quality and coverage against timeliness. Because of capacity constraints and late, lengthy or unslotted submissions, too much emphasis on the "six-week rule" often meant that some documents were issued unacceptably close to meetings, sometimes less than one week before the date of their consideration. From a practical standpoint, there was a trade-off between maximizing "six-week rule" issuances and minimizing less-than-one-week issuances. Experience had shown that issuing documents four weeks before their date of consideration while minimizing less-than-one-week issuances might be the best combination. In that connection, the Department welcomed the suggestion made in the Committee on Conferences regarding a one-year pilot project on four-week issuance of pre-session documents, and trusted that the Fifth Committee would support it. Moreover, it welcomed the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) that timely submission of documentation should be included as an indicator of achievement for author departments.

18. He had raised most of those points at the substantive session of the Committee on Conferences in the hope of receiving policy guidance. Regrettably, there had been little response. He hoped that the Fifth Committee would not simply have another round of lively discussions, but would make serious efforts to enhance the consistency and clarity of the mandates against which the Department would be judged.

19. **Mr. Saha** (Acting Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of ACABQ (A/60/433), said that the Advisory Committee had commented extensively on conference servicing in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 (A/60/7). Despite the improvement in the utilization of conference resources, the Advisory Committee remained concerned that the methodology used to calculate the utilization factor did not take into account the specific nature of the work of the various bodies subjected to study. The methodology should therefore be revisited with a view to developing an approach that would involve the measurement of results achieved with the use of available resources.

20. The Advisory Committee had been informed that the introduction of information technology tools had not led to a marked increase in productivity in some areas of the Department's work; rather, it had led to enhanced quality and accuracy. While the Advisory Committee considered measures to improve quality and accuracy important, it did expect that, with time, productivity would increase. In that connection, it

wished to point out the importance of developing tools to measure performance.

21. The Advisory Committee welcomed the Department's efforts to fill vacant translator and interpreter posts. It noted, in particular, that the Department was working with the Office of Human Resources Management to arrange an Arabic-language interpretation examination with the specific aim of filling vacant posts in Nairobi.

22. Lastly, the Advisory Committee continued to be concerned about the unprecedented number of retirements facing the Department in the next few years. It reiterated its recommendation that the Department should work out a special procedure with the Office of Human Resources Management whereby posts that were likely to become vacant, after taking into account possible promotions from within the Department, were advertised well ahead of time, with the proviso that they would be filled if and when they became vacant.

23. **Ms. Taylor Roberts** (Jamaica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, commended the Committee on Conferences for the quality of its report and encouraged it to actively pursue the implementation of its mandate. Since the Committee had been unable to reach consensus on recommendations, every effort should be made to complete that initiative at future sessions.

24. While the Group of 77 and China had taken note of the overall increase in the utilization factor for conference services at all duty stations, the methodology used for calculating that factor should be further refined. Vigorous marketing efforts had led to an increase in the utilization of conference facilities and services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, and the Secretariat should therefore pursue that strategy. The utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) had also improved but, according to the latest information provided to the Committee on Conferences, security considerations had led to restrictions on the use of United Nations premises for commercial activities, with the result that the utilization factor had dropped by 19 per cent over the first five months of 2005. While recognizing the validity of security concerns, the Group of 77 and China took the view that the United Nations should facilitate cooperation and interaction and, consequently, that denying access to all non-affiliated organizations, including academic institutions, was unacceptable. Requests for access should be considered on a case-by-case basis. The Group would appreciate further information on how the application of headquarters minimum operating security standards affected access to conference services at regional duty stations and offices.

25. Interpretation services were currently provided for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice. However, the 5-per-cent decrease in the number of such meetings that had been provided with interpretation was cause for concern, particularly since there had also been a 15-per-cent decrease in the number of requests for such meetings. Since that reduction in services had been due to the improvement in the overall utilization factor, it was clear that the established practice could no longer serve as a basis for providing services, including interpretation, to meetings of regional and other groups. The only viable alternative was the provision of dedicated funds for such meetings.

26. One of the key objectives of the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management was the provision of high-quality documentation in a timely manner. However, that goal had not been achieved and the late issuance of documentation had become a chronic problem that was negatively affecting the Organization's legislative process. Consequently, the Committee on Conferences should, in accordance with its mandate, conduct a thorough analysis of the situation and provide the General Assembly with recommendations on possible solutions and accountability measures.

27. The guidelines on page limits set out in General Assembly resolutions 52/214 and 57/283 B should be implemented with some flexibility to ensure that the quality and substantive content of the documents in question were not undermined. The heads of author departments should be responsible for monitoring compliance with page limits. The rules governing the simultaneous distribution of documents must also be followed, with respect to both printed copies and the posting of parliamentary documentation on the Official Document System and the United Nations website.

28. She underlined the importance of summary and verbatim records, which constituted the institutional memory of the United Nations. As evidenced by the

results of the relevant pilot project, setting a time frame for the publication of summary records was the best way to solve the late issuance problem, and the Secretariat should therefore advise the Fifth Committee on innovative ways of eliminating the current backlog within existing resources.

29. The vacancy situation in the language sections at a number of duty stations, in particular the United Nations Office at Nairobi, was a matter of some concern. It was therefore disappointing that successful candidates from the recent competitive examinations for language posts had declined to accept assignments in Nairobi. The Group of Arab States had offered to assist in conducting an examination designed specifically to recruit Arabic-language translators and interpreters to fill posts in Nairobi, and she would be grateful for an update on that situation. Translation and interpretation services should be of the highest quality and the terminology used should reflect contemporary trends in the official languages. Quality should not be compromised for the sake of cost savings in the recruitment of short-term language staff.

30. Owing to its relative lack of resources, the United Nations Office at Nairobi had continued to rely on other duty stations to develop and maintain its information technology capacity, and urgent measures were needed to improve that situation. In that connection, the proposed creation of a P-3 information technology position within the Division of Conference Services at that Office was a welcome step in the right direction.

31. The Group would be grateful for further information on the progress made in implementing the integrated global management project. It welcomed the letter from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences concerning the needs for accessibility measures to accommodate persons with disabilities (A/C.5/60/9) and stood ready to discuss that issue in more detail.

32. **Mr. Andanje** (Kenya), speaking on behalf of the African Group, commended the Committee on Conferences for its efforts to monitor and harmonize the utilization of conference services and welcomed the steps taken to increase utilization at all duty stations. However, further efforts should be made to step up the use of the Nairobi facilities with a view to bringing their usage levels into line with those of the other duty stations. To that end, the two programmes headquartered in Nairobi (the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)) should hold all their meetings and events at the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

33. The regular budget for 2006-2007 should also provide for the upgrading of the Office's information technology capacity, since the videoconference briefing given to the Committee on Conferences at its most recent session had indicated that Nairobi was disadvantaged in that area. In that connection, he welcomed the creation of a P-3 post within the Division of Conference Services and expressed the hope that a dedicated information technology unit would soon be established. The Office relied heavily on extrabudgetary funding to finance activities which, at other duty stations, were covered by assessed contributions. That situation must be addressed at the current session of the General Assembly.

34. The African Group was also concerned about the recent decrease in the utilization of conference services at ECA, which ran counter to the provisions of General Assembly resolution 59/265. It called for assurances that all possible options, including sustained marketing efforts, would be explored to further increase the use of the conference centre at ECA.

35. The high vacancy rates in the interpretation and translation services, particularly in the Arabic booth, were further cause for concern. In early 2005, the Group of Arab States had formally offered to conduct interviews in its member States in order to expedite the filling of vacancies at the United Nations Office at Nairobi. He would be grateful for information about the measures taken by the Secretariat in that regard. He also expressed concern about the perennial problem of the late issuance of documentation, and stressed that the General Assembly should address the issue of accountability for the late preparation of documentation at its current session. Hard copies of documents should be made available on time and in all official languages.

36. Lastly, with reference to the Secretary-General's report on the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, he noted that the Department had undergone an evolutionary change. However, the successful implementation of the integrated global management system was dependent on the provision of adequate resources.

37. **Ms. Kinnear** (Canada), speaking also on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, welcomed the encouraging progress made in the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, in particular the development of an integrated global management system. The compendium of policies, practices and procedures that was due to be issued in 2006 would be a valuable tool for comparing processes used at the various duty stations and for strengthening planning and coordination.

38. While commending the Department for the proactive steps it had taken to help client organizations make better use of conference services, she noted that the relevant report (A/60/112) did not provide information and updates on all the measures outlined in the original report on improving the Department's performance (A/57/289) and thus did not give a comprehensive picture of the current status of the reform. In future, a status report on each of the measures identified in the original report should be submitted to the General Assembly.

39. Since quantitative measures of efficiency and productivity were invaluable management tools for any organization, such measures must be developed to evaluate service delivery in the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. In that regard, she was disappointed that the Secretariat appeared to have abandoned its work on workload standards, which, while they might be an imperfect measure of efficiency and productivity, were the only means available. The costing of services was another important tool for effective management, and she would have liked to see further progress towards developing a system to undertake such calculations. Lastly, information technology played a growing role in the work of all United Nations bodies, in particular the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. Accordingly, Australia, Canada and New Zealand remained concerned about the slow progress made towards the establishment of a fully electronic document processing chain.

40. **Mr. Garcia** (United States of America) said that, in the area of conference management, the General Assembly should focus on the sensible prioritization of limited resources, continued technological modernization and ongoing managerial reform. Those goals should be addressed simultaneously from a system-wide perspective.

41. Conference management accounted for the largest single item in the proposed programme budget for 2006-2007. According to Secretariat estimates, the cost of a three-hour meeting with simultaneous interpretation was approximately $15,000 and that of producing one page of text in all six official languages was approximately $2,400. On the basis of those estimates, the total cost of the most recent session of the Committee on Conferences had exceeded $260,000, and he was therefore disappointed that the Committee had failed to fulfil its mandate. The session had been merely an exchange of views which had added little value to the conference management process. Accordingly, the Committee should be eliminated so that its allocated resources could be redeployed to higher-priority activities.

42. The United States had outlined its vision for the future of conference management at the Fifth Committee's 14th meeting, under agenda item 124. He welcomed the ongoing efforts of staff involved in the day-to-day business of conference management and acknowledged that, over the previous three years, a number of new operating methods had been introduced, including a slotting system for documentation and e-Doc. Integrated global management, which was now in its second phase, was a further step in the right direction, and he looked forward to its continued development.

43. E-Meets was an innovative tool for service providers and requesters. There had been a marked decrease in the number of meeting cancellations and in the amount of meeting time lost owing to late starts and early endings, and the overall utilization factor for conference services in New York, Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna had increased. However, nine bodies had consistently utilized less than the benchmark figure of 80 per cent of allocated resources; in future, bodies that failed to reach the 80-per-cent benchmark should have their conference resources automatically reduced. The current policy of providing conference services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States on an ad hoc basis should be retained.

44. He was disappointed to note that, of the 923 slotted documents in 2004, over 25 per cent had exceeded their page limit and almost 46 per cent had been submitted late. It was impossible to deliver documents on time if authors did not comply with the relevant requirements established by the General Assembly. Accordingly, timely submission of

documentation should be an indicator of achievement for author departments rather than for the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. The United States also supported enlarging the scope of the pilot project on the issuance of documentation four weeks ahead of its consideration.

45. Reducing or eliminating the production of summary records was a potential source of cost savings, and he would be pursuing that issue further during informal consultations. He looked forward to receiving information on the status of initiatives designed to fill vacancies in the translation and interpretation services. To enhance the credibility of United Nations bodies and draw greater public attention to the issues at hand, the General Assembly must take the lead in reducing the cost, frequency and duration of conferences and meetings.

46. **Mr. Golovinov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation wished to emphasize the vital role of the Committee on Conferences in ensuring the efficient management of United Nations conferences and meetings. It attached great importance to the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and was closely following the progress made in that regard. It noted with satisfaction the development and installation of many information technology systems aimed at improving document processing and meetings management. However, the likely contribution of such innovations to improving the quality of the services provided to Member States and increasing productivity in the units concerned must be analysed carefully. Particular care must be taken in reforming the working methods of the language services, the core functions of which were not amenable to automation owing to their basically intellectual nature. The main purpose of such reform must be to raise the quality of interpretation and translation in the six official languages.

47. With regard to the Department's project on integrated global management of conference services, the best guarantee of success was not rigid centralization but a balanced division of labour among the various duty stations, with the Department acting as coordinator to ensure optimum use of capacity.

48. His delegation had been pleased to note the creation of a number of task forces to monitor the progress made in the reform of the Department, as recommended by the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The conclusions drawn by those task forces would merit careful consideration by Member States. Regrettably, the Secretary-General's report (A/60/112) referred only to the fact of the task forces' establishment. He therefore hoped that more detailed information on their work would be provided in informal consultations.

49. The Committee's work at the current session was being hindered by the fact that some of the necessary documents were not yet available, which was a cause for deep concern. His delegation noted that, in some cases, author departments were to blame for the late issuance of documentation. In that connection, there was a need to address the issue of accountability. At the same time, there remained considerable room for improvement within the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management itself.

50. The main criterion in assessing conference servicing must be Member States' level of satisfaction with the quality of the services provided. In that regard, the Department must develop effective mechanisms for systematically monitoring user satisfaction. Such mechanisms must provide equal opportunities for all delegations to bring their views to the attention of the Department's managers. He noted with regret that the feedback questionnaires previously distributed by the Department had been available in only two of the six official languages.

51. While his delegation welcomed the holding of informational meetings with Member States, the Department must take specific measures to address the problems raised at those meetings. His delegation was particularly concerned about the quality of simultaneous interpretation from Russian into English. The quality of interpretation and translation into Russian also left something to be desired, although there had been progress in that regard. The steps being taken by the Russian Translation Service to hold individual translators more accountable for the quality of their work were likely to yield the desired results. In addition, the recent competitive examinations for Russian interpreters and Russian-language verbatim reporters, editors and translators/précis-writers should enable the Secretariat to fill the respective rosters with highly qualified candidates who possessed the requisite knowledge of United Nations terminology and had a flawless command of modern Russian.

52. One of the factors in ensuring that conference services were of a consistently high quality was the provision of equally favourable working conditions for all language services, as well as adequate human and financial resources, as called for in General Assembly resolution 59/265. In its discussions on the pattern of conferences, the Committee should focus in particular on assessing the Department's implementation of that resolution.

53. **Mr. Shen** Yanjie (China) took note of the constructive efforts made by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to improve the quality and efficiency of its services. It had moved gradually away from a reactive approach and towards more proactive management, as evidenced by the implementation of an integrated global management system. Nevertheless, while author departments should be held accountable for failing to meet deadlines for the submission of documents, the Department must take further steps to establish an effective mechanism for cooperation with those departments. He welcomed the pilot self-evaluation project on the effectiveness of the slotting system and took the view that a transparent system for document submission should be introduced throughout the Secretariat.

54. While the departmental task force had found no justification for any upward revisions of the existing workload standards, the increased use of information technology should result in enhanced productivity. In that connection, he looked forward to receiving additional information about the development of new performance management tools and, in particular, about the task force's suggestion that the existing workload standards should be supplemented by an array of management data along the lines of the "balanced scorecard" used in both public and private institutions.

55. The quality of the services provided to Member States should be the primary criterion for the recruitment of translators and interpreters, who must be well versed in the most modern terminology. In that connection, internationally recruited staff must be treated as such by the Organization. Lastly, he welcomed the efforts of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to address the issue of the delivery of summary records and would be grateful for additional information about the estimated resource requirements for some of the measures proposed in that regard.

Agenda item 129: Human resources management

Composition of the Secretariat (A/60/310 and A/C.5/60/L.2)

Amendments to the Staff Regulations (A/60/365)

Amendments to the Staff Rules (A/60/174)

Study on the availability of skills in local labour markets for which international recruitment for the General Service category takes place (A/60/262)

Agenda item 129: Human resources management (*continued*)

Agenda item 130: Joint Inspection Unit (*continued*)

Review of the headquarters agreements concluded by the organizations of the United Nations system: human resources issues affecting staff (A/59/526 and Add.1)

56. **Ms. Beagle** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) introduced the reports of the Secretary-General on human resources management issues (A/60/174, A/60/262, A/60/310, A/60/365 and A/C.5/60/L.2). The Office of Human Resources Management continued to work in partnership with programme managers to reform human resources management so as to build the Organization's current and future human resources capacity, strengthen its ability to attract, develop and retain staff of the highest calibre and ensure that the international civil service was characterized by high performance, continuous learning and managerial excellence and accountability.

57. While considerable progress had already been made, any large-scale reform programme was an ongoing process that required the support of all interested parties and significant culture change. New policies and procedures must be accompanied by new ways of thinking and doing business. In implementing the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the Office of Human Resources Management intended to put in place a strengthened human resources management framework

in order to move towards an increasingly operational and field-based Organization.

58. The report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat (A/60/310) provided a wide range of data on the demographic characteristics of Secretariat staff. It also contained an analysis of the representation status of Member States and information on the progress made in the third human resources action planning cycle. A list of all Secretariat staff holding an appointment of one year or more as at 1 July 2005 was contained in document A/C.5/60/L.2.

59. In his report on amendments to the Staff Regulations (A/60/365), the Secretary-General proposed that the Committee should approve amendments to regulation 1.2 (n) and Regulation 10.2 of the Staff Regulations in order to enhance the financial and disciplinary accountability of United Nations staff. The General Assembly was also requested to take note of the amendments to the Staff Rules set out in the annex to document A/60/174.

60. Lastly, the Secretary-General's report on the study on the availability of skills in local labour markets for which international recruitment for the General Service category took place was contained in document A/60/262. The General Assembly had requested the study in order to reassess the determination made in 1975 that recruitment from outside the area of the duty station was necessary to staff text processing units. The study, which had been carried out by the Office of Human Resources Management in cooperation with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, had taken into account a number of recommendations made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services in its related report (A/59/388). It had reconfirmed the availability of qualified candidates from the local market for the English Text Processing Unit but had indicated limited availability for the other five official languages. The Office of Human Resources Management would appreciate guidance from the General Assembly on whether further study, including expanded outreach efforts, should be undertaken to determine conclusively whether recruitment from outside the area of the duty station was necessary to meet the Department's staffing needs. Should such further study be deemed necessary, additional resources would be required.

61. **Mr. Münch** (Joint Inspection Unit (JIU)), introducing the report of JIU on the review of headquarters agreements (A/59/526), said that the report's recommendations included increased access for spouses of international civil servants to the labour markets of the various duty stations, as well as efforts to ensure the speedy resolution of day-to-day problems to which international civil servants and diplomats might be exposed in their relations with the host countries. The report also highlighted the importance of ensuring the professional and personal well-being of staff members as a means of bolstering staff morale and productivity.

62. JIU was pleased to note the positive comments made on its report by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, but wished to address two of the concerns raised in the Board's report (A/59/526/Add.1). First, the fact that the JIU report did not specifically refer to experts on mission should be seen merely as an effort to focus on essential matters. JIU supported the Board's view that experts on mission should also be the beneficiaries of the report's relevant recommendations. Second, the JIU report did not advocate mandatory participation of staff members in national social security schemes; it only suggested that if a host country did offer voluntary participation, staff should have the opportunity to accept the offer and to be properly advised. That option could be particularly advantageous for staff with short-term contracts.

63. The report's recommendations and findings had drawn positive feedback from United Nations funds and programmes, as well as some specialized agencies, and had already led to certain improvements in host-country practices.

64. **Mr. Fareed** (Director, Secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination) introduced the Board's report on the review of headquarters agreements carried out by JIU (A/59/526/Add.1). The Board welcomed the background information contained in the report and, in general, agreed with its findings and conclusions. The Joint Inspection Unit's analysis of headquarters agreements was a valuable contribution to efforts to improve staff conditions, and the Board generally welcomed its recommendations because they encouraged staff mobility, spouse employment and proper respect for the privileges and immunities of the system and its staff on the part of the Governments concerned.

65. However, the Board was somewhat concerned about some of the report's recommendations, which seemed to disregard the framework applicable to experts on mission, who, under article VI of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, were also entitled to robust privileges and immunities. Its concern related in particular to recommendations 4, 5 and 7.

66. The Board fully supported recommendation 1 on the need for more liberal host-country policies on the granting of work permits or similar arrangements for the spouses of United Nations system staff, and also fully supported recommendation 2 except with respect to integration into the social security system. Since such integration was supposed to be a voluntary option, it should be excluded, as United Nations rules did not prevent staff from taking out personal insurance or entering into safety-net arrangements with private or State enterprises. Moreover, he did not see how integration into a national social security system on a short-term basis could be advantageous, since such systems were normally of greatest benefit to long-time participants.

67. Recommendation 3 was already being implemented by the United Nations system organizations. Recommendations 4, 5 and 7 were acceptable, bearing in mind the issue of the treatment of experts on mission; he took note of the additional comments made in that regard. The Board members did have reservations concerning recommendation 6, at least in its current formulation. While the idea of a model agreement with host countries might appear attractive, the recommendation was perhaps an oversimplification of a complex and variable subject. In general, however, the Board hoped that the report would serve as a model for future JIU reports.

68. **Mr. Horner** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania; the candidate countries Croatia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; and, in addition, Iceland, Norway, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the European Union wished to reiterate its support for the effective management of human resources within the Secretariat and for the ongoing reform efforts. The Secretariat should be modern, forward-looking and staffed by competent and efficient individuals who were responsive to existing and future challenges. Incorporating modern management practices into the working methods of the Secretariat was a way to achieve that goal and to preserve and enhance the Organization's effectiveness and efficiency. The European Union therefore looked forward to receiving innovative and well-justified proposals for simplifying existing human resources regulations, as well as concrete proposals for the staff buyout, as agreed in the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

69. As the Committee had held extensive discussions on human resources management issues at the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly, all substantive reports relating to the Office of Human Resources Management should be considered as a whole at the Assembly's sixty-first session, in line with the biennial consideration of the relevant agenda item. However, with respect to the proposed amendments to the Staff Regulations on financial disclosure and sexual exploitation and abuse, speedy decisions should be taken at the sixtieth session. The European Union would therefore welcome an update from the Secretariat on its consultations with United Nations bodies with fiduciary responsibilities. The European Union also urged the Secretariat to address the issue of succession planning for vacancies, as a large number of posts would become vacant through retirements over the next five years.

70. Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations remained the guiding principle for the appointment of staff. Although the system of geographical distribution worked adequately, and the European Union welcomed the efforts made to reduce the number of unrepresented and underrepresented Member States, the system's problems might relate more to recruitment practices than to methodology. Better use should be made of the rosters of candidates who had successfully completed national competitive examinations, as noted in General Assembly resolution 59/266, and greater emphasis should be placed on the attainment of targets contained in human resources action plans. He had been disappointed to note from the Secretary-General's report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/60/310) that several departments had consistently fallen well below many of the targets established in the action plans. The European Union therefore wished to receive information about the accountability mechanisms and corrective measures introduced to improve managers' performance.

71. The European Union welcomed the continued upward trend in the overall representation of women in the Secretariat, and urged the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to achieve the desired 50/50 balance. However, it was disappointed at the Secretary-General's report on the availability of skills in local labour markets (A/60/262), which fell far short of the desired response. The European Union noted the report on gratis personnel (A/59/716) and agreed with the Advisory Committee that the information should in future be included in the report on the composition of the Secretariat. It also noted the report of JIU and the related comments of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, and in that connection recalled paragraphs 10 to 12 of part VIII of General Assembly resolution 59/266, which directly addressed some of the issues raised in the JIU report.

72. **Ms. Taylor Roberts** (Jamaica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that although substantive human resources issues would be considered at the General Assembly's sixty-first session, a number of issues should be discussed and clarified at the current session. The Group supported the findings of the JIU report, especially with regard to the issuance of work permits for spouses and family members of United Nations staff, the simplification of procedures to facilitate the exercise of the privileges, immunities and benefits granted to United Nations organizations and their staff members, the dissemination by the organizations and host countries of information on the privileges and immunities granted to staff and the formulation of a model headquarters agreement incorporating the basic features to be included in respect of all organizations.

73. The Group wished to re-emphasize that all host countries should issue visas for United Nations staff and officials in a timely manner, and urged all Member States to facilitate the Organization's work by addressing that problem. It would be grateful for clarification of the conditions and requirements for the recruitment of permanent residents at Headquarters, including any change-of-status requirements and the underlying reasons for any such requirements.

74. With respect to the Secretary-General's report on the composition of the Secretariat, the Group of 77 and China wished to reaffirm the need to adhere to the principle of equitable geographical representation in the recruitment of staff at all levels, as highlighted in many General Assembly resolutions and in the Summit Outcome. The Secretariat should provide Member States with comprehensive information on the nationality and gender of all current under-secretaries-general and assistant secretaries-general, as well as a status report on the recruitment efforts undertaken by the Secretariat with a view to ensuring the international character of the Organization. The report should include the nationalities of all staff recruited thus far at the senior and management levels (P-4 and above).

75. **Mr. Al-Hayen** (Kuwait) said that the reform and development of human resources was a prerequisite for overall reform and development of the Organization. His delegation supported the reform efforts undertaken over the past seven years and agreed that the Organization should be staffed by highly qualified and honest personnel recruited in accordance with the principle of fair geographical distribution, as noted in the Secretary-General's report (A/60/310).

76. Reform was an ongoing process which should also ensure equal opportunities for men and women. Kuwait hoped that unrepresented or underrepresented Member States would be given more opportunities to participate in the Secretariat's activities, as the principle of fair geographical distribution lent greater transparency and credibility to the United Nations system. Kuwait hoped that the reform of human resources management would enable all peoples of the world to be a part of the Organization and ensure that high-level positions were not monopolized by certain States.

77. **Mr. Garcia** (United States of America) said that unless the reform of human resources management was addressed, the many common objectives set out for the United Nations could not be achieved. His delegation had carefully reviewed the reports on the system of geographical distribution and the composition of the Secretariat (A/59/724 and A/60/310) and looked forward to reviewing the Secretary-General's proposals for implementing management reform, as called for in the Summit Outcome.

78. In order to achieve equitable geographical distribution, Member States should encourage their nationals to apply for United Nations posts, and programme managers and senior management should make a sustained and proactive commitment to the recruitment and selection of staff in accordance with Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations. Section V of the report on the composition of the

Secretariat clearly demonstrated that many departments were not meeting their representation targets.

79. The United States was concerned that there continued to be over-represented, underrepresented and unrepresented States and that the Secretariat was apparently reluctant to limit the hiring of nationals of over-represented States. Senior management must expect and demand results from department heads in that regard. As noted in the report on the composition of the Secretariat, approximately 1,773 retirements were anticipated for the period 2005-2009, representing almost 15 per cent of the total workforce. The Secretariat should immediately seize that opportunity to address long-standing gender and geographical imbalances in respect of all Member States.

80. Turning to the Secretary-General's report on amendments to the Staff Regulations (A/60/365), he said that the Secretariat should revise its proposals on accountability and transparency to include all officials serving on intergovernmental bodies. Those officials should be held to the same standards as other senior United Nations staff members. His delegation agreed with the Secretary-General's recommendations to amend the Staff Regulations in order to clarify the definitions of sexual exploitation and abuse, in line with General Assembly resolution 59/300.

81. With respect to the JIU report on the review of headquarters agreements (A/59/526), he said that the United States took its host country responsibilities seriously, and questioned the report's premise that such agreements might negatively influence the Organization's ability to retain and hire staff. His delegation looked forward to discussions on related topics that fell within the purview of the Fifth Committee and not that of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country.

82. The Secretary-General's report on the study on the availability of skills in local labour markets (A/60/262) raised more questions than answers regarding the availability of qualified local residents who might be interested in performing editorial and desktop-publishing duties at Headquarters. The report had identified local applicants as those who had given the New York metropolitan area as their current address, and his delegation wished to know whether applicants from surrounding communities had also been considered, since there were a number of large metropolitan areas, with populations numbering in the millions, within a day's drive of New York City. Since the study had not been widely publicized, individuals living outside the New York metropolitan area might have been excluded because they were unaware of potential employment opportunities at Headquarters.

83. **Mr. Shakshuki** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that, according to the report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/60/310), as at 30 June 2005 17 Member States had been unrepresented, compared with 15 in June 2004, and 9 Member States had been underrepresented, compared with 10 in June 2004. His own country was one of the underrepresented States. That was a matter of concern, particularly as his country's assessed contribution had approximately doubled. He pointed out that his country's representation in terms of posts encumbered had consistently been below the midpoint of the desirable range.

84. Some 636 Libyans had applied for posts between May 2002 and June 2005, but none of them had been recruited, even though his country was underrepresented. The appointment and selection procedures should ensure the independence of the international civil service, but his delegation did not consider that the system was sufficiently transparent and accountable. The Office of Human Resources Management should take steps to ensure the equitable geographical distribution of posts and to increase the representation of Member States that were underrepresented or unrepresented in the Secretariat.

85. **Mr. Yamamoto** (Japan) said that his delegation recognized that the management of human resources was of paramount importance for the Organization and appreciated the recent reform efforts made by the Office of Human Resources Management. Referring to the Secretary-General's report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/60/310) he recalled that the General Assembly, in its resolution 59/266, had requested the Secretary-General to prepare an analysis of the level of underrepresentation of Member States. That request had not yet been complied with. In the understanding of his delegation, what the General Assembly had requested was an analysis of the difference between the number of nationals recruited and the lower limit of the desirable range of each underrepresented Member State, as well as an analysis of the number of newly recruited staff from underrepresented Member States. His Government was concerned about the problem of

underrepresentation, and it requested the Secretary-General to complete the work requested by the General Assembly by including an analysis of the level of underrepresentation in the next report on the composition of the Secretariat.

86. **Mr. Mirmohammad** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his delegation appreciated the report on the review of headquarters agreements (A/59/526), which focused on human resources management issues with a view to enhancing the conditions of service of the staff. The Joint Inspection Unit's recommendations in that regard were intended to encourage staff mobility, spouse employment and the proper implementation of and respect for the privileges and immunities of the United Nations system organizations and their staff members by host countries. His delegation considered that the report was timely and relevant, as the headquarters agreements covered a wide variety of issues relating to staff members' conditions of service, the enhancement of which was an important element of the reform of human resources management, particularly in connection with the mobility policy.

87. Turning to the report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/60/310), he said that his own country was among the States that were not adequately represented in the Secretariat. Indeed, recent annual reports on the composition of the Secretariat showed a steady downward trend in the representation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. To his delegation's knowledge, only one Iranian national had been recruited to a post subject to geographical distribution in the past 27 years. Since the Iranian nationals who had been appointed to posts subject to geographical distribution 30 years earlier would shortly be retiring, his country would soon be unrepresented. His delegation therefore requested the Secretariat to ensure that the representation of the Islamic Republic of Iran would not remain under the midpoint figure.

88. **Mr. Shen** Yanjie (China) said that his delegation was concerned to note, from the report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/60/310), that the representation of developing countries at the senior and policymaking levels had declined in recent years. As far as the representation status of China was concerned, the number of Chinese staff in substantive departments had been declining steadily, and those who were employed were at relatively junior levels. Some departments, such as the Department of Political Affairs, no longer had any Chinese staff members. His delegation appealed once again to the Secretariat to implement General Assembly resolution 57/305 and to identify solutions to ensure that developing countries were actively represented at the senior and policymaking levels. Over the next five years an average of 355 staff members would retire annually; that demographic situation represented an opportunity to substantially improve geographical distribution. His delegation noted that in the implementation of human resources action plans, only 19 per cent of all departments had reached the target of balanced geographical recruitment, and only 15 per cent had reached the target of limiting recruitment from over-represented Member States. Such poor performance was regrettable, and his delegation requested the Office of Human Resources Management to strengthen and refine the human resources action plans and to urge departments to meet targets in order to ensure that recruitment was geographically balanced. The Management Performance Board should continue to monitor the performance of senior managers in achieving the targets contained in the human resources action plans and enhance the accountability of participating departments.

89. The assessment of the system of geographical distribution (A/59/724) had presented three scenarios relating to possible changes in geographical distribution: varying the weight of the membership, population and contribution factors; expanding the population and the base figure to include staff not currently considered to have geographic status; and making changes in the application of the system of weighted ranges. The Chinese delegation believed that a rational system of geographical distribution should take into account all three factors (membership, population and contribution) in arriving at appropriate weights that could balance the interests of all Member States. His delegation noted that the study made dramatic adjustments to the weights of the three factors. He asked the Secretariat to explain the basis on which the factor of 15 per cent upward or downward had been set. A dramatic adjustment of the existing three factors could hardly balance the interests of all parties and was therefore impractical.

90. Turning to the study on the availability of skills in local labour markets (A/60/262), the Chinese delegation noted that local staff with adequate text-processing skills could be found only for the English Text Processing Unit. His delegation welcomed efforts

to economize and was in favour of the local recruitment of text-processing staff where possible. However, the quality of work should never be compromised merely in order to save costs. There had been cases in which internationally recruited staff, including temporary Chinese staff, had been paid at local rates as an economy measure. His delegation had repeatedly sought to stop the practice, but without success. The Office of Human Resources Management should ensure that the practice ceased, as fairness and transparency in the recruitment process were essential. His delegation also urged the Office to strengthen its monitoring of the recruitment efforts of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, given the length of the recruitment cycle, the lack of transparency and inequitable geographical distribution in the hiring of peacekeeping personnel.

91. His delegation had read with interest the report of the Secretary-General on gratis personnel provided by Governments and other entities (A/59/716) and hoped that the Secretariat would elaborate on the related employment procedures and the utilization of such personnel, in particular the employment of interns. The JIU report on host country agreements (A/59/526) proposed making adjustments to those agreements to improve conditions of service. His delegation believed that it was important to actively seek the opinion of host countries and strive for consensus in that process.

92. **Mr. Farooq** (Pakistan) said that human resources management formed the foundation for an effective Secretariat and had taken on greater importance in the wake of recent events which had cast doubts on the credibility of the Secretariat and had highlighted the need to strengthen accountability both within the Secretariat and to the Member States. The central elements of effectual human resources management were the recruiting process and career planning. The Charter provided that staff should meet the highest standards and should be recruited on as wide a geographical basis as possible. However, there had been persistent complaints that the selection process lacked the necessary transparency and that selection criteria were often designed to favour certain candidates. His delegation believed that the representation of developing countries should increase, particularly at the senior and policymaking levels.

93. The report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/60/310) indicated that a small number of countries supplied a large proportion of the staff; that was incompatible with the global nature of the United Nations and with the Charter provisions requiring that staff should be selected on as wide a geographical basis as possible. His delegation requested information on the measures being taken to rectify the imbalance and on the factors responsible for the declining representation of developing countries at the senior and policymaking levels.

94. The recruitment of women had increased and women constituted a majority in the General Service category. However, they were still poorly represented at the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General levels, and their representation was below what might have been expected at the D-2 and D-1 levels. The report provided no information on the representation of women from developing countries; his delegation attached great importance to that issue.

95. The discussion of human resources management also needed to take account of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, which stated that in order for the United Nations to be able to deliver its mandates more effectively, its financial and human resource policies, regulations and rules must be in conformity with the current needs of the Organization. The Secretary-General had been requested to provide the General Assembly with his recommendations for a review in that regard, and Pakistan wished to identify a number of principles that should guide the formulation of those recommendations. It was important to reaffirm previous General Assembly resolutions on human resources management, and the Secretary-General's reform proposals should be consistent with the reform measures already under way. The administrative and managerial flexibility given to the Secretary-General should be in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and the mandates of the General Assembly. The delegation of authority to programme managers should be in accordance with the Charter and entail clear lines of authority and accountability. Finally, the review of human resource policies should ensure that United Nations staff remained impartial, in accordance with Article 100 of the Charter, and did not seek instructions from any authority external to the Organization.

96. **Mr. Nguyen Dinh Hai** (Viet Nam) said that the aim of human resources management reform was to build a more productive, flexible and results-oriented Organization that could better serve the Member States. Such reform should lead to a comprehensive

and fair system of recruitment, placement and promotion, a better staff structure based on the principle of equitable geographical distribution and gender balance, appropriate conditions of service for the staff, a transparent system for the delegation of authority together with a proper system of accountability and responsibility, and an effective system for the administration of justice.

97. With regard to equitable geographical representation, his delegation felt that faster progress needed to be made in addressing the problem of the non-representation and underrepresentation of a number of Member States, particularly developing countries. Some progress had been made in improving gender balance, but further efforts were still required if the goal of 50/50 gender distribution in all categories was to be achieved in the coming years.

98. The 2005 World Summit Outcome had specified activities to be undertaken in all areas relating to human resources management. His delegation believed that, with the active participation of all Member States, those activities would result in the strengthening of accountability and oversight; improvements in performance, transparency and competence; and the reinforcement of the ethical conduct of the staff at all levels, thus enhancing the Organization's credibility.

99. **Mr. Jonah** (Sierra Leone) said that, since 1980, certain Governments had begun to make supplemental payments to their senior staff. That practice was at variance with the code of conduct of the international civil service and the Charter. Strenuous efforts by the Secretary-General to seek information from Governments and from staff as to the details of such payments had failed. He asked whether the financial disclosures to be required would in future make it necessary for staff to state whether or not they were receiving such payments from their Governments.

100. **Ms. Beagle** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) said that answers to the questions raised by Member States would be provided in informal consultations.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.